

How to Stop Unwanted Cravings & Emotional Eating

With Marc David

James: Hey Marc, how's it going? Great to chat.

Marc: Hey there, James. Thanks for the wonderful introduction. I'm feeling so good about myself now.

James: That's nice. You should do because we've had many conversations over the years and I've enjoyed all of them. **I'd like to start out if you could explain to us a little bit about the psychology of eating and what's the difference between what you eat and what you think about what you eat?**

Marc: Oh, what a great question. You know, when it comes to good nutrition these days, what I like to say is, what you eat is half the story of being healthy when it comes to nutrition. Who you are as an eater is the other half of the story. So the psychology of what you eat, you know, the whole field of eating psychology, to me, it's all centered around looking at our relationship with food as a great teacher. If I'm looking at food as my enemy, if I'm looking at food as my problem, if I'm looking at cravings as a problem, we tend to attack our problems. If I'm looking at emotional eating as my problem, we tend to attack the problem. And because of the experiences living in me, that means I'm attacking myself.

So for me, first and foremost, the psychology of eating is really all about understanding that whatever is happening in my relationship with food, if I'm challenged with cravings, if I'm challenged with weight, if I'm challenged with emotional eating, yeah, I don't love those challenges. It's not my first choice, but I'm going to use those as a great teacher. I'm going to see, like, what is this trying to tell me about myself? Is this trying to tell me something about my body, my nutrition, my metabolism, my health, my genetics? Is this trying to tell me something about my personal world, my inner world, my emotional world, my spiritual world?

So food is a great teacher and hence, the body is a great teacher. And you know, I don't think we always realize this, but the mind is impacting our metabolism probably moment to moment. You know, people probably had the experience where you're sitting in a room, you're at home, you might be a little down, you might be a little depressed, you didn't have the greatest day, and all of a sudden the phone rings and it's somebody with good news, or it's somebody telling you you want a bunch of money. And, as soon as you hear that other voice on the phone, your energy picks up and you go from depressed to happy just because you hear a voice. Just because you

hear a friendly voice, somebody that you want to speak to, and literally within an instant, you didn't have a cup of coffee, you didn't take any drugs, but your metabolism changed just because of an experience and a thought.

And that's just how quickly the mind can phone in a prescription to the body and change metabolism. And I think that's happening all the time with our nutritional metabolism, meaning the optimum state of digestion and assimilation and calorie burning and our natural appetite regulation and our natural weight regulation. That all happens in the physiologic relaxation response. That all happens in parasympathetic nervous system dominance.

So if I'm stressed, if I'm in a stress response, that's the state where my digestion is in a full-blown stress response, digestion is going to fully shut off. Meaning, you're being chased by the lion, your body wants to survive. Your body is at its prime imperative. We got to run away from the lion or you have to defeat it. So in about a minute or two, you have an incredible metabolism, but during that time, what's happening is your digestion completely shuts down because you're fighting the lion, all your metabolic energy wants to go into fighting the lion, and blood is moving away from your midsection. So you're not digesting, you're not assimilating nutrients in that moment and your appetite is deregulated because you don't want to get sidetracked thinking about pizza or going out for your favorite meal while the lion's chasing you. You want all your energy into thinking, okay, I'm in a survival moment here.

So here's the thing, the brain doesn't distinguish between a real or an imagined threat. So if I'm sitting around and I'm about to eat my meal and I'm stressed out because I had a hard day at work, or I'm angry at my partner and we haven't resolved it, or because I hate my body because it's got too much weight and I'm not losing weight and I just weighed myself, I'm creating a stress state, anger itself is going to create a stress state.

Worrying about work that day, worrying about my partner, anxiety about my partner, judgment about them or me or anything. That's all going to create some version of a stress response, which again means sympathetic nervous system dominance. And my brain is sending signals throughout my body to slow down or stop digestion, slow down or stop assimilation. So I'm going to be excreting nutrition, and so I'm not going to be digesting my meal fully and properly, I won't be getting the full value from that meal. And on top of that, my appetite's deregulated.

Most people when they're eating under stress, they tend to eat more. And then you think you have a willpower problem. Oh my God, I have a willpower problem because I'm eating more. And I'm like, No, actually you are producing more of the main stress hormone cortisol. And cortisol when it's circulating in the body, blunts our pleasure receptors. So cortisol basically tells your body 'don't feel pleasure', which makes sense if it's the main stress hormone. Because when the lion is chasing you, you don't want to get all cozy looking for a new pillow. You don't want to be feeling pleasure, you want to be feeling pain. If I get bit, if I get cut, you want to know, am I

damaged? Am I bleeding? How is this fight going? So pleasure receptors, blunted pain receptors activated point being, when you and I are under stress and we eat, I need to eat more food to get the same pleasure that I'd normally get if I was relaxed.

James: Wow. Yeah. I mean, there's so many incredible points you've touched on there, and I think first and foremost that stress plays a massive impact on our digestion. But then when you talk about this, I feel like our lifestyle is full of stress. I mean, many people are watching the news every night, or we have this device in our pocket that delivers 24/7 death, pain, fire, destruction, terrorism into our lives. And then we add on top of that a huge phenomena.

And you know, a friend of mine was sitting at a cafe in Paris, her name is Sarah Wilson, and she's a very renowned, sort of health and wellness expert. And she was sitting with a French friend of hers and she said that they saw two girls walking down the street and they were walking and eating a baguette. And this friend said, Oh, they must be tourists. And my friend Sarah said, Why? Well, because they're walking and eating. And it was such a profound acknowledgement because in Europe, people sit down to eat, they have two hour lunches, there's a siesta afterwards. So they're invoking this relaxation approach to food. And our culture in the West is set up in an opposite way.

Can you speak to some of the cultural impacts that the way that we approach food has an impact on our health?

Marc: Oh, such a brilliant example. In so much of Western culture these days and more and more it is getting imported all over the world. We value speed. I want a fast internet, I want a faster car, I want a fast response. I send out an email, I want an answer back. I send out everything. Our TikTok video is really fast. Everything is short. Attention spans do it fast. And it's funny because we think of fast food, and fast food is not just food that was made fast, but fast food is food that you eat fast. And eating fast by itself is a stressor to the body. Humans are designed to eat in a relaxation state.

It just so happens that you could be the most relaxed person in the world. I could put your favorite meal in front of you. And I say, okay James, I want you to eat this meal really fast. That's going to be a stressor for your system because you're not designed to do that. Like, Why is this guy making me go fast? This is, so the body sees it as a stressor. So you're going to once again, be in that stress response, which is going to decrease digestion, assimilation, deregulate your appetite, create more insulin, and cortisol would signal your body to store weight, store fat, and not build muscle. All the opposite of what you want. So it's as if so much of the culture that we're creating these days is moving us away from the natural.

You know, the Europeans, so many Latin American countries, they really understood, they were working with the natural rhythms of the body. I remember the first time I went to Italy, it's like

everything closed down at lunchtime and the biggest meal was lunch, which to me was phenomenal.

James: Well, I mean, I can comment on this while we're talking. The biggest meal is lunch. You're right. There's like this circadian approach to nutrition. In the natural world, I'm living in Vanuatu right now, people wake up, they're slow, they eat gently in the morning, the biggest meal at lunchtime, and then in the evening they eat less and down they go to sleep. **So tell me about your experience in Italy.**

Marc: So here we are, everything's closing down at lunch. Biggest meal is eaten at lunch. So if you are stressed, you cannot possibly stay stressed for two hours sitting and eating, talking, having a good time. And even if you are stressed, people are drinking wine at lunch. So that's going to relax you. And the whole experience is designed to create a relaxation response.

Plus, you mentioned I think circadian rhythms. It just so happens that our strongest metabolism, our strongest calorie burning metabolism happens at the moment the sun is highest in the sky. So, in the time that we often call high noon, about 12 to 1:30-ish, your best calorie burning metabolism. So it makes sense that you'd want to eat your biggest meal at that point. Compare that to the morning or the evening time where your calorie burning capacity is less. So there's a little known field called bio-circadian nutrition that looks at these nuances.

And what's interesting about that is, do you ever wonder how traditionally sumo wrestlers, how do they gain all that weight? Because hundreds of years ago, they didn't have ice cream and cookies and cake in Japan. You know, they had rice and they had seaweed and they had sushi. How did they gain weight? And as it turns out, what sumo wrestlers would do and still do is, they eat their biggest meal not only in the evening time, but then they wake themselves up at night, in the middle of the night, 2:00, 3:00 in the morning when your metabolism, your calorie burning metabolism is at its absolute slowest and they have a huge meal and then they go back to sleep. They are taking advantage of the fact that your calorie burn worst in the very late evening, early morning hours.

And certainly as we move towards the evening, now what happens is a lot of people, we eat a small breakfast, we might eat a moderate size lunch. And then, you know, especially me growing up in New York and New York City, dinner is by far your biggest meal. And a lot of times, people are not getting off from work until eight, nine o'clock. So you might go out to a restaurant and have a huge meal over the course of a couple of hours. And essentially, you're on the sumo diet when you're doing that because you're eating the bulk of your calories in the last quarter of your day when you burn least efficiently.

James: Wow. That's really profound, Marc. So, and I think, one of the things that then sort of comes up for me is that a lot of the times in the middle of the night people will say they've got

cravings or, you know, they're craving certain foods, or in 3:00 in the afternoon they'll crave certain foods. So you've spoken to us now about these cycles and how our calorie burning maximum is at zenith high noon.

But then how do you explain cravings and why do cravings come up for people? Is it that they really want a Coca-Cola or a Mars bar or something sugary? Or is there something else happening here?

Marc: Well, the challenge with cravings, I think, is that they're kind of complex. It's sort of like having a headache. You can have a headache. And we can probably come up with right now a hundred different reasons why a human being could have a headache. You could be dehydrated, it could be a reaction to a prescription drug, it could be a stress headache, it could be lack of sleep, it could be tension. So there's so many reasons why a human being can have a headache.

There's a good, at least, eight or nine or 10 great reasons why a person can have a craving. Probably the least common, I'll start with that first, is what you see animals do. Animals in nature will often reach for some very strange plants. Carnivores will all of a sudden, like your dog or your cat, might all of a sudden start eating grass. A dog might start eating clay. They're trying to get the medicinal value from those foods. So sometimes if your body wisdom is sharp enough, you will crave something that your body is actually needing. You're desiring something. I often hear people say, Oh, I just really need a piece of meat. And a lot of times that's a craving. I'll especially hear that from a lot of people who don't eat a lot of meat. And when they crave it and they eat it, it just feels like something gets satisfied. You know, cravings are often the body trying to create balance. So the body's trying to create balance.

So if we look at the craving not as bad or evil, and we ask ourselves if every symptom has a brilliant reason that's rooted in biology or psychology or both, then what would be the wisdom of a craving? I'll give you an example wisdom of a craving. If somebody's dieting and they're eating too low calorie, just plain and simple, they're eating too low in calorie, the body isn't smart enough to say, Hey, you know, you're only eating a thousand calories. You don't have enough energy in your system. You're missing micronutrition and macronutrition.

The brains are smart enough to say that the brain just notices a nutritional deficit and it screams hungry. So you will crave just about anything in that moment. You'll focus on whatever's in your environment, whatever you like best because your body's hungering for calories. If ice cream is your choice, then boom, you'll crave ice cream because the body literally thinks it's starving and the brain is wanting you to survive. So, the brain and body are correcting an imbalance.

Let's say you went on a diet, a weight loss diet that's really low in fat. And we call fats EFA - essential fatty acids. You need them to live. Every cell wall in the body is comprised of some great degree of fat. Your brain is largely water and fat. If you sucked all the fat out of your body, you'd

be dead in an instant. So not good to have a fat deficiency. So what's going to happen is, if I'm eating a low fat diet, I might find myself craving fatty foods. And what often happens is, the mind will go towards what it knows best. So for a lot of people, they're not going to necessarily crave olive oil. They're going to crave a fried, fatty food. They'll crave fried chicken or french fries because somehow they've got that strong association that's a fatty food, even though it might not be the healthiest fatty food in the moment. So again, the brain is trying to correct a deficiency that's caused by our habits.

Meal skipping can do the same thing. Meal skipping can make your body think that you are on a desert island, that there's no food available, so your brain is going to drive you to go. It's just going to drive you, and just scream hunger. A lot of cravings, let's say sugar cravings, sugar cravings are a tough one because we have five kinds of taste buds on the tongue. A lot of those taste buds are sugar taste buds. They're sweet taste buds. Those taste buds are centered in the middle of the tongue and towards the front where most of your food hits. And you got to ask yourself, What are those sweet taste buds doing there? They're essentially sitting there tapping their foot, waiting for something sweet to come. So they're literally designed to give you pleasure.

Mother's milk to a baby is intensely sweet. So there's a part of us also, there are no poisonous sweet foods in nature. So when you and I were running around the environment, or when our distant ancestors are running around the environment trying to figure out what's good and what isn't, if you found something bitter, it could be poisonous, bland, it could be poisonous, pungent, it could be poisonous. If you found something sweet, you hit pay dirt, it's not going to kill you, in fact it's good for you. So what also happens is, in a non-tropical environment where you have four seasons, the sweet foods come out in the summer and in the late summer, in the fall. So sweet foods always signal to the mammals that winter is around the corner. So here where I live in Colorado, there's all kind of bears and a bear will, well there's no blueberries here, but in Massachusetts where I used to live, the bears would clean up a mountainside of blueberries.

Bears will eat hundreds and hundreds of pounds of blueberries, they will get bear obese, they will get fat, and they then hibernate and they use all that body fat to become their nutrition source, their insulation, et cetera, so they can survive. So when the bear senses sugar, its brain goes, Oh my goodness, better eat this while you can't. The mammalian brain, when it senses sugar, it thinks winter's around the corner, I better store. And so the brain functions in a feedback loop and tells you, Ah, sugar, eat more. The problem is, we don't live in the natural environment anymore. And it's not like you and I are going to hibernate for the winter. What's happening is that you can get sugar 24/7. It's always available. You can get it anytime, any place. So anytime we eat it, there's a natural tendency for the brain to want more.

So it's a craving that is partially built into the system. And it's also, I think on an emotional level, sugar gives you a powerful pleasure. Chemistry release, sugar does that in any food, any dessert that has 50% fat approximately and 50% sugar gives even a greater pleasure chemistry hit for a

lot of people. So that's just kind of how we're naturally designed. And here I am, I'm not loving my life and my husband, my boyfriend, my wife, my girlfriend just left me, or my elderly parent is sick, or something's going on. And I need to regulate my unwanted uncomfortable emotions. And when you want to regulate unwanted uncomfortable emotions, that means you want to get out of pain. And it means you want pleasure and the brain will quickly go to the most immediate source of pleasure that it can think of, which for most human beings, it's food. Feel bad, eat food, feel better. And sugar makes you feel better, faster than a carrot will make you feel better or faster than a salad. You know? So the brain wisely goes, I want sugar because this is going to relieve my tension, relieve my stress. Because that's what the brain is wanting. It wants to seek pleasure and avoid pain. We want to get out of discomfort. So it makes sense that we would go for sugar. And the problem is, here we are going for sugar. So part of the training is, so there's a reason for the craving and it makes sense.

See, that's the thing, I think that's most important for people to realize that craving, and we'll crave other foods. So you might crave chips. Chips might be what gives you a pleasure hit. Most people don't know this, but, the big companies that make the Doritos and the Lays potato chips, they have engineered those foods to maximize its pleasure value to you. Not only is the level of salt and taste and artificial flavor designed to hit your bliss point, but they even figured out the most pleasurable perceived crunch level in your ears when you're crunching on the food. So there's actually crunch levels that you perceive when you're chewing on something. Some are pleasurable, some are moderately pleasurable, some are a little bit uncomfortable.

They figured out the exact crunch that human beings love. So it makes sense that you would crave that food because the food scientists have put a lot of time and energy companies have put a lot of money into figuring out how do we get you to keep buying this stuff and eating it. So you're going to go for the food that you associate with the most pleasure. And for some people it's salty, crunchy. For a lot of people, it's sweet. For some people it's gooey sweet, it's liquid sweet. Everybody has their preference. So a craving is often emotionally driven and it feels like the food has power over us. Just like for an alcoholic, it feels like the alcohol has power because I'm driven to it. I can't resist it.

But sugar is just a, it's just a pile of white sugar. It doesn't really have any power per se, except that, Wow, it gives me a pleasure chemistry release really fast. It takes me out of my emotional pain from not liking myself, not liking my life, having complaints about whatever's going wrong. So our cravings, when they're emotionally driven, we can begin to notice that and we can begin to ask the question, which is not easy, called, "What else"? What else can I do in this moment other than reach for that food if I'm trying to not reach for that food?

James: Yeah. That's really powerful. And I think, what you're alluding to here, well there's a few points. When you were talking earlier, it reminded me of an interview I did with Kris Carr, who's an incredible woman who overcame a pretty severe cancer diagnosis. And she was very addicted to

sugar and processed foods, and she would literally have to go spray cleaning chemical on sugar in her house to stop her from eating them. You know, it was really quite, quite bad. And she eventually, in retrospect, realized that she was trying to fill a hole that you could never fill with sugar. And that she made the connection that it was an emotional issue that she was trying to dampen out or eat her way out of. And that, that could never be solved with food. So if people are starting to identify with this particular type of craving, there's an emotional craving to food. There's just like, I need this, I need to have this.

What are ways that people can start to de-couple this addiction or this craving and start to break away from these unhealthy addictions to either chips or to sugary foods and to start to become more healthy?

Marc: Great question. I think first of all, from a dietary perspective, it's all about looking, what else can I do in my diet to create more nutrient density, to create more quality just in the rest of my diet? Because a lot of times there's places we can work in diet other than get rid of sugar other than get rid of my favorite binge foods or my favorite craving foods. How else can I bring nutrition into my diet such that I'm upping the level of health in my body and I'm starting to give my body signals that here's what works for you, here's what's good for you.

So one piece of the puzzle is, just upping the quality of one's diet in general without fighting the food that you're trying to fight. So I'm never looking, I will never tell a person, you need to fight that craving. Quite the opposite. I would prefer a person to go with their craving. So there's a moment when we know you are going to, that we're going to eat the food that we say we don't want to eat. Sometimes you could avoid it, sometimes you could resist it. Sometimes you could choose to do something else. I'm going to take a shower, I'm going to take a walk, I'm going to get out in nature, I'm going to go play some music. So sometimes we're not going to do that. Sometimes we're going to eat the food that we're craving when that happens.

My favorite strategy is, get present, get relaxed, sit down, eat that food, and eat it with awareness and get everything out of it that you want because that's why you're eating it. Now what happens is, we are making the act of eating the food that we said we don't want to eat. We're making it a crime. Bad food. Now who eats bad food? Bad people. What do you do to bad people? You punish them. Now I will self-punish myself because I'm a bad person who ate a bad food. So how do I do that? Well, you know, negative self-talk. I diet really intensely. I exercise intensely afterwards. Okay. All kind of punishments. But what a criminal also does is you want to do the crime fast. If you're going to rob a bank, you don't take all day, you do the crime quickly.

So if you're going to eat a food that's on your bad list, even though you want to eat it because you're craving it and you're craving it because you kind of love it, then what's going to happen is you're going to go unconscious. When you eat it, you're going to do it fast. When you go unconscious, when you eat it, when you eat anything, the brain isn't registering taste and

pleasure and aroma and satisfaction and the visuals of the meal. We call that the cephalic phase. Digestive response, the head phase of digestion.

The brain wants experience, humans want experience. Humans eat. Animals tend to feed, but we eat, we create a cuisine. We create a whole stick-around food that we love because we're cultured creatures. And so when someone is eating a food that's on their bad list, chances are they checked out of their body, they're not really present. And when you're not present, you need to eat more of that food once again to feel the pleasure that you're seeking from it. You're eating it so you can have pleasure, and you can have pain reduction. So the idea is to get present, because what you're doing is you're introducing consciousness, you're introducing wakefulness, you're introducing awareness because the habit, when people check out of their body, they're going unconscious. And when you go unconscious, you can do all manner of silly things. You can do all manner of things that you say you don't want to do because you're checked out and you're unconscious. When I'm checked in and I'm conscious, Ooh, I'm going to think twice. So we're eating this food, we're choosing to eat the food, the chips, the ice cream, the chocolate. I'm enjoying it. And what I'm doing is, I'm inviting consciousness back in, and consciousness now is going to help me experience this, get what I want, and it's going to start to remove the shame and the guilt and the self-attack because I'm staying in awareness because it's the shame and the guilt and the self-attack that has me do it quickly, has me check out, has me feeling bad about myself, and when I feel I'm going to feel bad about myself when I'm finished. And then what am I going to do at some point to make myself feel better about myself again, I'm going to eat.

So it's a cycle and it's a time cycle because that tension is building up. I ate something I shouldn't have, I'm a bad boy, I'm a bad girl. Guilt, shame, self-attack, self-abuse. At some point you can't take it anymore and I'm going to reach for food again, and then I'm going to repeat that same cycle. So we're always reaching, we're often reaching for food to regulate my unwanted emotions, but then I'm yelling at myself and abusing myself for having eaten the food. So we eat it consciously and that strengthens your choosing muscle. So next time you're craving that food, actually, you have more strength. Your choosing muscle is stronger to choose not to do it and choose to do something else. Not because you have more willpower, but because you have more consciousness and you can stop and think, Wait a second, ah, if I eat that, here's what's going to happen. I'm not going to feel good about myself. My stomach's going to feel a little queasy. I usually eat too much. I'm going to feel all that guilt and shame, huh! So we're trying to maintain consciousness and for that reason, for people that deal with emotional eating or cravings, I tell them practice the same thing at any meal.

Practice checking in when you eat as opposed to checking out, because a lot of people eat on automatic pilot. We were talking about the cultures that slow down and sit down when they eat, you're checking in and you're creating an experience. It's not just the food, you're with your friends, you're with your loved ones, you're in conversation, you're present to all the sensations of the experience. And that's nourishing for us. So when on a day-to-day basis you're getting your

full experience from every meal or every snack, it's going to make cravings less powerful. Because a lot of times we're wanting something that we never get.

A lot of people never get a full experience of pleasure from food. They never feel nourished or satisfied from food. I eat, I finish, I go on to the next thing. I eat really fast, I finish, I go on to the next thing. And the brain's not smart enough to tell you, Hey, slow down, eat like a European, you know, relax brain, brain just says hungry. It's hungry for taste, it's hungry for experience. It's hungry for an experience of food that satisfies us. I'm not even sure if I answered your question or not.

James: Well, you really did and you went deep into cravings. And I think one of the things I'd like to touch on now is how people can build healthy rituals around approaching food in a calm way. Some of the ways I do it to share, is that we will sit down to have a meal as a family, and children or people sitting with us will always have to ask before they can leave the table. So, this sense of shared responsibility to be present, also at the Food Matters headquarters, I make sure people to never eat when they're sitting at their work desk because working and eating are not two things or two words that should be shared. And I take time to smell my food. We give a blessing and reverence for the food before we eat it.

And, you know, one other really obscure thing, Marc, that I think in particular in the US culture, I've noticed, and my son is a US citizen, so I have a love for America, is that people at restaurants will often come up and they'll say, are you still working on that? And I find that use of language so obscure because when I approach food, I never work on eating my food. It's a joy and a pleasure. So I think in the US there's this huge connection with rush food and eating is work, and you know, there's this move towards greater and greater efficiency.

If people are struggling with cravings, what are some rituals or practices that you might recommend that people can use to approach their breakfast, their lunch, their dinner, or even a snack? How can people bring more mindfulness as you say, or more consciousness to the eating experience?

Marc: I think for a lot of people, letting go of a majority of multitasking when you eat. A lot of people are eating and on the phone, eating and like you say, they're eating and they're working, and devotedly some of the time of your meal to being focused on the meal. There's some people, I meet a lot of people who are single, they live alone and they eat and they watch TV or they eat and they read because it makes them feel like they're with something or with someone. So I say, okay, pretend that's your other person, but make sure you are focused on the food. Make sure you're focused on the experience.

For some people it's music in the background that relaxes you. You know, find the kind of music that really soothes you and helps you get into a slower rhythm, helps you get into a more

peaceful rhythm. Helps you get into a more of an upbeat rhythm if that's what it is for you. Music, I find is a big one. Deciding on time can be useful and it doesn't have to be a hard line, you know, I must take 15 minutes to eat, but there's a lot of people who, you know, I'll always ask clients, students, friends, family, loved one, are you a fast eater, a mono eater or a slow eater? And if somebody says fast eater, I'm going to just say, your job is to teach yourself how to become a slow eater. And slow means- doesn't mean a speed, slow means present, aware, pleased, nourished, relaxed, sensuous. And for some people they need the guideline of a little bit extra time because a lot of people eat their breakfast in two minutes and they ate their lunch in five minutes and no wonder they're still hungry afterwards, even though they might have eaten a lot. Because it takes a little bit of time for the brain to register satiation. So just agreeing to give yourself more time than you usually do, I find is really helpful.

Pay attention to what bowls are you using, what silverware do you use? Like, what makes you feel good to eat out of or drink out of? Is there some type of favorite bowl that you have or plate that you have that just adds that extra ritual to it. And especially for families, people with kids. I love some of the practices that you all do. And also enrolling kids in helping prepare the meal, helping cook it, whatever they can do makes them more invested in the eating of the meal. It just gives eating the meal a little bit more empowerment because they know that they somehow helped. Even for my son when he was two years old, I would just have him push the button on the blender, you know, or turn the knob to turn on the gas. You know, just even that, was like you're participating in the process.

James: Yeah. That's so beautiful. I love those recommendations and, you know, we all help out making food as a family and in Vanuatu here where I am now, we grow a lot of foods. It's a beautiful experience to pick your own food and then bring it into your own kitchen. And I think that can really help heal relationships with food. And I've seen many projects, there was many documentaries we signed for FMTV, our previous channel, which is now on Gaia, that were projects around connecting communities in inner cities to gardens and where food comes from. And it just reconnects these bonds to real food. And then you cherish a tomato, you cherish basil, you cherish these things that come from your garden. So that's really, really powerful.

Now, for a lot of people that are experiencing cravings, they can certainly use some of the recommendations that you've made here so far. And I think they're very profound. And I know that you'll be teaching more depth on this inside in the Certification program, but can we talk a little bit now about weight gain and weight loss? I mean, I know we sort of started out the conversation on this and I know a lot of people struggle with cravings and then that's typically connected to weight gain. And so much of this can be tied into our psychology and cravings and this lack of self-worth and negative self-talk for people that, you know.

What are some other tactics or approaches separate to what we've covered today that you would recommend for people that are trying to shift stubborn weight gain or just that mid-section that won't disappear?

Marc: For me, when somebody's been dieting for a long time without lasting success, the first thing I think in my mind is whatever they've been doing hasn't been working. What happens is a lot of people, I speak to people, they'll tell me, I've been dieting for 20, 30, 40, 50, 60 years. And I think to myself, my goodness, how could you do something that long that doesn't work? Usually for me, if after 10 years something's not working, I'll change. Hopefully it won't be that long. But we've been very conditioned to believe that dieting, less food is the royal road to weight loss.

So the first thing I like to do is just, let's change up as much as we can. And the first thing I want to change up with people who've been dieting for a long time and haven't gotten their results is I want to change up our thinking. because it all starts with what we're thinking and how we're framing it and what we're believing about it all. And first things first, I would always like to see people look at their weight loss as a journey. If you want to lose weight, you're going on a weight loss journey. And I call it a journey because we don't exactly know precisely how anybody's going to lose weight or when, and I know that's to be true because the person I'm working with has been dieting for decades.

They've tried everything. They might've lost weight, they might've gained it again, they might've lost it again and gained it again so they haven't lost weight sustainably. So I want to see this as a journey and not only do I want to see it as a journey, but I want to see this as, once again, my relationship with food and body. It's a great teacher.

So what is it that I'm learning on this journey? What is my personal journey with weight trying to teach me? Because I'm going to assume that there's a higher wisdom and a higher power that designed this all and is guiding it all. And I want to know the answers. I want to get to a deeper level so I can only get to a deeper level if I'm asking deeper and more powerful questions. So what's life trying to teach you now?

Sometimes life is trying to teach us if we're trying to lose weight, Hey, you need to eat different. You need to eat more, better quality food, you need to eat less of this or more of that, that sort of thing. Sometimes our weight loss journey is teaching us about our emotional eating, which means it's teaching me how to manage my emotions better. It's teaching me how to regulate. It's asking me to learn how to regulate my emotions in ways other than food.

What happens is people make weight loss their biggest goal. They make weight loss their most important goal. And when I'm talking to somebody and I'm perceiving I'm getting that weight loss is their biggest and most important goal because it's ruling their life. And if I don't lose weight, I can't be happy. I can't be the real me. A lot of people say, you know, I can't be happy until I lose

weight. Well, how long you've been trying to lose weight? Because that's how long you haven't been happy. So you're affirming to life, affirming to the universe, affirming to me, yourself and everyone. I am not happy, nor will I be happy until a bunch of body fat leaves. And then what happens is, we attack the problem, we attack the weight, we try to starve it off, we try to diet it off, we try to exercise it off.

And a lot of our approaches, we're kind of bullying the body. We're starving it, we're fighting it, we're bullying it with intense exercise. And then on top of that, we're bullying it with our thoughts. I'm not going to love you until you lose weight. I'm not going to love me till I lose weight. In fact, I hate this body. I hate this body fat, I hate this belly, I hate these hips, whatever we're saying. So we're self attacking, which creates a stress response, which creates increased insulin and cortisol, which signal the body to store weight and store fat and not build muscle, which is the opposite of what I'm trying to create.

So for somebody who's been dieting for a long time and they haven't gotten the results that they want, what I want to do is to actually reverse the process and say, listen, let's make a list. I want you to tell me who you're going to be when you get to your target weight when you hit the ideal weight that you want, who you're going to be, describe that person. What's life going to be like? Give me all the details. How's it going to be different? Usually, you'll hear things like, I'm going to be more outgoing. I'm going to be the real me. I'm going to be more confident, I'm going to be more sexy. I'm going to just show up more. I'm going to be more outspoken. I'm going to feel lighter. I'm going to wear my skinny clothes. That sort of thing.

And usually, there's only two things on the list that they can't do now. Wear their skinny clothes. And even though people say, I'm going to feel lighter when I lose weight, a lot of people are, you could be skinny and be quote-unquote heavy in your energy, in your consciousness, in your emotionality. So there's heavy meaning, depressed meaning, lethargic meaning not feeling good about who I am. So a lot of people are letting their weight create heaviness. That doesn't need to be there. I meet a lot of big body people and they are light. They just got a lot of light and they're lighthearted and they feel light and they lift you up when you're around them that, that person's light. They're not heavy in any way, but people think, Oh my God, I feel so bad. I'm going to feel lighter when I get rid of all this weight. No, you're going to feel lighter, when you feel lighter. You're going to feel more confident when you choose to feel more confident. You're going to be more outgoing when you start being more outgoing. You're going to be more sensual when you just start to be more sensual.

So let's create the results that you expect at the end of your weight loss journey. Let's start to create those now. The ones that you can do now, let's just start doing those now. How can you be the real you now? How can you be the most self-expressed you now, because that's what you think you're going to be when you lose weight. Let's start to do that now. This way. You are in that energy. You are signaling to your body exactly what you want. You're actually getting the results

right off the bat. So you don't have to be in all this terrible anxiety and fear like, am I going to get there to be my real self? You're not putting all the power in a bunch of body fat.

So to me, hitting ourselves into weight loss never works. Punishing ourselves into weight loss never works. Bullying the body into weight loss never works. I mean, it works temporarily. You can bully anybody to do anything. But what have you created, you haven't created a sustainable, happy relationship with that person. You just bully them. And that's what we do with the body. We bully it, it loses weight, and then it comes right back on as soon as the bully's gone, as soon as we let go a little bit and as soon as like, God, that was hard. You know, I can't exercise like that all the time. I can't start myself like that.

So, I want to create for the people I work with, for my students, my clients just a different mindset. And part of that is also realizing, helping people see. So a lot of people are trying to lose weight or looking at food as the enemy. And if food is the enemy, I am in an ongoing battle. I'm in an ongoing fight, which means you're in a constant day-in day-out stress response that is unnecessary. Be in a stress response when you need it. Be in a stress response when there's something to actually be stressful about. When your kid's in trouble, when there's financial issues, whatever it is. Yeah.

Be in a stress response, but don't be in one when you don't have to. Food is not your enemy, but if you look at food as your enemy, then you're going to create behaviors that don't work. You're going to be trying to limit the amount of food you have, which as we've seen, the more you limit your food, you create nutritional deficiency, you create caloric deficiency and the brain screams hungry. And then emotionally, either you binge eat, and then you think you're a willpower weakling and you self-attack. And then you want to relieve yourself of all that bad emotion by eating again. So if you're trying to lose weight, you have to lose the belief that food is your enemy and embrace the wisdom that food is your best friend. Wow. And the idea is to learn how to eat, not learn how not to eat. Weight loss, dieting is all about how not to eat what you were describing with your family on this beautiful island. You're learning how and you're teaching them how to eat, you're not teaching them how not to eat. So a lot of people need to embrace food.

James: Absolutely. Yeah. I think, so many interesting points in there. And you know, I think just reflecting on some of the takeaways I've already had from this conversation, is that first just starting where we were. The first point was embrace your cravings and sit with it. If you're going to eat something that's not good for you, do it with love. Do it with reverence. I think that's really powerful. And then now, as we progress, there's this sense of bringing this mindfulness to the experience of food, but then also this way that we're constantly in a fight with our bodies. And I think that's such an interesting observation, you know, that we're constantly fighting our bodies and that we belittle them and we're going to beat them up into submission and, you know, these strict diets.

Whereas, David Wolfe always told me as well, he said, never focus on taking things away because that puts people in a state of stress, in a state of lack. And that most diet philosophy is, do not eat this, do not eat that. Instead, focus on adding in good foods and it will cloud out the bad foods. And I think that's a beautiful philosophy. And, I think probably one of the biggest challenges in the health world now reflecting on this, is that as we learn more, especially this community, and if people are studying to become a Nutrition Coach, they're learning about foods that are bad. And that could set up this cycle of 'I shouldn't eat them', 'That's dangerous', 'That's wrong'.

But you are teaching us a more holistic approach, which is, Yes, there are good and bad foods, but more importantly you should eat good foods in a good way. **And if you occasionally eat bad foods, you should eat them in a good way. Is that a correct assumption, Marc?**

Marc: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. And to take away the moral value from the food and to do our best to look at food is, it's just morally, it's neutral. Like, the ice cream cone hasn't conspired in an evil master plan with the sugar in it to rot your teeth. It's not mean, it's not out to get you, it's just inanimate. I like to look at foods as it either enhances my health to some degree, or it detracts from my health to some degree. Good for my health, not so good for my health. Because when people use the term good food and bad food, what can happen is that, it goes into a moral value. And if I think that well, sugar is bad for me, then what happens if I eat it? It makes me a bad person. And you have to punish bad people. So, that's what makes it easier.

If you're going to eat the food that's on your no-no list, embrace it and enjoy it because you know something, if you do that, it just might have a medicinal value for you. The amount of pleasure that you get from it, the amount of joy that it gives you just might outweigh whatever toxicity it has. You're right. That's kind of how I look at it. Because, you know, sometimes the right dessert, the right food eaten at the right time, it could be liberating. It could, it can feel great for somebody, especially when it's helping us avoid just the cascade of negative talk and self-attack and self-punishment that we enact when we consider ourselves a bad person for eating a bad food.

James: Yeah. Very profound. I love that idea. And it's just also the idea of when you go on holidays, sometimes you're going to drink some wine, sometimes you might eat some ice cream, and, which is something I very rarely do, hardly ever. And I ate something the other day and it was just such a joyful moment and I was like, wow, wow. You know, and I don't need it again. I'm okay. But it was just really about diving into that experience. And I think that it's a really beautiful lesson you share and it also teaches us to take ourselves less seriously. Because, I mean, early on in 2008 when I was going to these raw food festivals in Sedona, Arizona, people would say, Well, how much of a raw foodist are you? Are you a hundred percent, 90%, 95%?

There's this very strict dogma that can sometimes happen in nutrition. You know, are you paleo? Are you vegan? Are you vegetarian? There's all this stress, and if you are vegetarian or vegan, and then at some point you choose to eat something because your Naturopath or you learn about something, and you go out into an animal product, then there's this, you know, you think you're a bad person, like you said, and you want to punish bad people. So there's this whole self-talk. So really important that we discuss the psychology of eating. It's almost as important as what we eat, which I think is why this discussion, and why there are lessons, and why you're such an important teacher on this topic.

I'd like to sort of finish a little bit with this conversation coming back to cravings. So a lot of people crave foods and they're emotionally craving those foods and then those emotional cravings can lead to poor health. This is a big cycle we have in the West, and we spoke about bringing mindfulness to the craving in order to start to break down that negative association.

But what are some other lifestyle habits or even foods or nutrients that you could recommend to people that are suffering with emotional eating or craving issues that they could be doing on a day-to-day basis, such as waking up in the morning or first things to eat or before a meal or before that afternoon slump? Is there any sort of recommendations, practices, foods, nutrients, supplements that you could suggest?

Marc: Sure. Yeah, big question, but let me offer some strategies that I have found useful. Firstly, for people who find themselves craving carbohydrates and sugar throughout the day, there's been a lot of research and it's a very often repeated study that shows that when people eat a carbohydrate-only breakfast, so you only eat breakfast cereal or you only eat a donut or a muffin or some breakfast cake or a sugary drink or juice. When you eat a carbohydrate-only breakfast, you will tend to crave carbohydrates and sweets throughout the day.

So if you find yourself emotionally eating, and if you find yourself having carb cravings and sweet cravings throughout the day and you eat a carbohydrate or mostly carbohydrate-only breakfast, shift it to a more protein and fat centered breakfast. You know, something that's centered around, I don't know, a yogurt, a cottage cheese, eggs, you know, healthy, just healthy versions of those healthy cheeses, healthy meats, healthy fish, a nice healthy smoothie that has some good protein, some coconut oil in it. So get away from the carbohydrate or sweet-only breakfast. That can help a lot of people.

Another thing is that one of the great sort of bio-hacks that I've used over the years is to use, and again, this is for any kind of cravings and especially works for sweet cravings, but really any kind of craving as the craving comes on, have in your cabinet or your refrigerator some veggie broth available or some bone broth or some miso broth. You can buy all those in a supermarket, in a health food market these days, warm it up and drink it. And there's something about getting minerals and electrolytes quickly into the system that is very soothing to the body, that's very

calming to the nervous system. And I have just found helps take a craving down from, you know, a 10 out of 10 to a three or a four or sometimes even less out of 10.

So some type of mineral broth. So again, it's a veggie broth, a bone broth, a miso broth when you feel the craving coming on. Even better. A lot of people know I tend to crave at certain times during the day. So 20 minutes before that, drink your broth and just notice what happens. This is an experiment even on top of that, you can, if that works for you, you could then try drinking broth of any kind that I've mentioned throughout the day. Because there's again, something about it. When we have readily absorbable, quickly absorbable minerals and electrolytes in the system, it does something to soothe us. That's just what I've noticed. And especially when you're warming up, the body feels nourished by warmth. It feels nourished by that sort of soup energy, even though I'm just asking you to do a broth as opposed to a thick soup, because it's easier, it's quicker, it's absorbed much faster. So, that I found is really great for cravings.

You know, for a lot of people, their cravings can be related to certain deficiencies. You could be iron deficient, you could be literally low ferritin in the blood, and that'll cause us to feel weak, which will cause us to crave food. People could be low in B12, they could be low in magnesium, they could be low in glutamine. You'd really have to go to a functional medicine-type practitioner or doctor to get tested to see just what you might be naturally deficient in. I find also that a lot of times people are deficient in, a lot of people these days are deficient in vitamin D. I'm a big supplement guy, but I'm not a big vitamin D supplement guy. And the reason is, get it from the sun as best you can. If you can get outside and if you can get sun, there is something that does that a vitamin D supplement cannot do. And it's going to elevate mood, and just elevating your mood with sun is very powerful.

I also find that a lot of people tend to be disconnected from breathing, especially if we're not exercising. Even if we are exercising. I find breathing exercises very helpful. There's all different kinds of yogic breathing exercises that just get us connected to breath and body. And when you're connected to breath and body more, when you practice long, slow, deep breathing, or when you practice rapid yogic, lion's breath, something like that, you can use that when you have a craving. I will do long, slow, deep breathing if I'm having a craving that I don't feel like having. You know, sometimes if I have a stressful day and I go to sleep, I can wake up in the middle of the night and I might crave something and I know I don't want to eat it because it's not going to make me feel good. And it's just my body's way of trying to relieve stress.

So usually for me, that's when I'm going to go to the breath. That's when I'm going to go to breathing because it's just a wonderful tool to invite me into the body and invite me to de-stress and invite me to get conscious in the moment. Because usually when we're going to go to a craving, a part of us is in a stress response and a part of us is unconscious or about to go unconscious and check out. So it's always about doing things that help me check back in. So for

me, breathing check, it helps me check back in. Taking a cold shower helps me check back in. Stepping outside and just looking at the trees helps me check back in.

James: I love it. That's so beautiful, Marc. These insights have been so powerful. And, I'm so grateful for your time and your expertise. Really, honestly, this is such a big part of nutrition and it's a conversation that is solely missed in so many different circles. So many people become obsessed, myself included in my early nutrition journey about nutrients and calories and specific types of diets as opposed to focusing on the way we eat and how we approach food. And I think some great teachers along the way have enlightened me to some of this insight. And I think your expertise and your body of knowledge is really powerful at helping people really understand the power of this. I think if you had, you know, any final message for people to leave, and maybe we can, I'd invite you to jam on this point a little further as we wrap up here.

But in functional medicine or natural medicine or natural approaches to healing, we see prevention and treatment or cure as the same thing. So if something can prevent something, it can help to bring healing to it. And also we see symptoms like tumors or atherosclerotic plaque buildup or insulin, blood sugar levels as not so much as a problem, but as a solution, as your body trying to heal itself. You know, the body is creating a tumor to protect itself from the overgrowth of cells. So we see it as a negative thing, but actually it's a positive thing. Or we see atherosclerotic plaque buildup in the arteries as a negative. However, that's your body doing a great job at using free flowing cholesterol in the body to patch up arteries that are breaking down because of potentially long-term stress or vitamin C deficiency, which is creating this breakdown of the body. So the body is always seeking healing and it's speaking to us.

Is there anything that you'd like to add to this? Because I know that some at the start of our conversation was here and you are looking towards asking better quality questions. I'd love for you to just leave the audience and this masterclass with some insights at the end here.

Marc: Well, piggy-backing on what you just said, it reminds me, I don't know why I never learned this in graduate school. Why I've read so many textbooks. I've read so much, heard so much, listened to so much, and at some point it might have been in an obscure textbook somewhere. I learned that all healing and all maintenance and all repair of body tissue happens in a relaxation response. So when your body repairs itself, it's generally happening while you're sleeping or it's happening while you're in a relaxed state, when you're lying on the couch, when you're on vacation. But generally that, it's going to find that relaxation state when you are asleep. But all healing, maintenance and repair of body tissue happens in the state of relaxation. All great creation, all creativity happens in that state. That same relaxation state parasympathetic nervous system dominance.

You're not going to create a great work of art when you're running from a lion and a stress response. You're not going to have some brilliant idea that's going to be life changing for you

when you're all stressed out. It's going to happen when you're in that relaxation response. So body heals, trauma heals, the more we can drop into a relaxation response because trauma's locked in stress. So I always want to ask the question, what helps me move into that relaxation response?

And you know, oftentimes when people hear that, they're going to think, Oh, well, meditation or yoga, but it's far more than that because when you think of it, what puts us in relaxation is love. When you're loving or when you're feeling loved, you're in a relaxation response. When you're feeling like you're in a state of trust, you're in a relaxation response. When you're feeling faith in your life or in a universe or in a higher power, you're in a relaxation response. When you're giving your gifts, when you feel like, Yeah, I'm being me, I'm contributing. You're in a relaxation response. When you're being intimate with somebody, you're in a relaxation response. When you are forgiving someone, you're in a relaxation response.

So there's so much more that puts us into that state of relaxation where healing takes place of body tissues and healing takes place of anything else in us that needs to be healed. Our hearts, our emotion, our past, it happens as we go into, I think, deeper levels of relaxation, but also finer levels of it. You know, meaning the place where we find trust, the place where we find faith, the place where we're in love and giving love and sharing love. So the more we can do that, the more, to me, we're expressing our best self. And the more we express our best self, the harder it is for the body to be in an unnatural state.

So if my unnatural state right now is excess weight, the way I look at it is, the more I become the best version of me, the more my body has a chance to become the best version of it. So our metabolism will tend to track our psyche, it tends to track our inner life. So when I'm being the best version of me, my body has the best chance to be the best version of it. So instead of just focusing on the weight loss, focus on being the best person you can be. What is that for you as you're looking to heal from whatever disease you have? What else helps you be the best, the most self-expressed you? Because that has to contribute to your healing somehow. And at the very least, even if it doesn't contribute to healing, you know, whatever biological challenge you're facing, you'll at least be expressing your best self. So you'll feel a lot better about yourself.

James: Marc, profound words there for people, for myself, for the world looking to heal, to become more whole and connecting to that higher version of ourselves. I think that's such a beautiful way to end this conversation. And I know that if people are resonating with this discussion today, they're going to love your teachings inside the Nutrition Certification program. I want to thank you so much for your time, for your contribution to helping people connect deeper with their true selves, reducing stress, and building healthy, loving, lasting relationships with food. Thank you so much, Marc.

Marc: James, Thank you. Thanks for guiding this wonderful conversation and for being such a beacon of light for so many people and for just getting so many good messages out there. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, my friend.

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